Can NGOs Make a Difference?

The Challenge of Development Alternatives

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Civil Society Participation as the Focus of Northern NGO Support: The Case of Dutch Co-financing Agencies

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Of the Dutch development cooperation budget, between 11 and 14 per cent is allocated to Dutch non-government organizations that are known as 'co-financing agencies' for supporting partner organizations in the global South. The co-financing agencies (CFAs) claim to further civil society participation in diverse ways: by supporting basic rights education, capacity building on democratization issues, advocacy efforts to address myriad injustices, and strategic networking. In this they take up a long-standing challenge for civil society actors committed to promoting alternative development and social justice: the promotion of citizenship status and rights for marginal people and groups (Nerfin, 1987; Friedmann, 1992). However, and although talk of participation and rights-based approaches is central in their organizational discourse, few use coherent frames of analysis to shape their programmatic strategy or a lens through which to understand the results of the work they fund.

This chapter draws on a recent evaluation that examined how the support given between 1999 and 2004 was used by four of the CFAs – CORDAID, HIVOS, Oxfam NOVIB and Plan Netherlands – to further 'civil society participation' in Colombia, Guatemala, Guinea, Sri Lanka and Uganda (Guijt, 2005). The evaluation team considered over 330 civil society organizations and over 760 contracts from CORDAID, HIVOS and NOVIB, plus three country programmes for Plan. In exploring the efforts of these CFAs to increase and strengthen the participation of citizens and civil society organizations in decision-making processes, within diverse, violent and conflict-ridden contexts, two issues stand out as having a wider relevance for the theme of NGO alternatives. The first relates to the integration of new forms of analysis within the strategic and operational work of development agencies, and thus

concerns the research/action interface that has been identified as critical with regards to the role of NGOs in promoting development alternatives (Hulme, 1994: Introduction). The second concerns the possibility that NGOs can help build progressive linkages between 'big D' interventions and 'little d' processes of development – in this case processes of citizenship building – through recognized funding modalities *within* the international aid system, rather than departing from it altogether (see Edwards, this volume).

In this chapter, I proceed by providing a contextual discussion of how Dutch NGOs have tended to conceptualize and fund work on civil society participation (CSP) in developing countries, before outlining the contextual features affecting CSP in the five countries involved in the evaluation. I then describe some of the CSP work that was observed, in terms of approaches and outcomes, before proceeding to outline the key ways forward for NGOs seeking to support civil society participation.

Understanding and Promoting Civil Society: Perspectives and Approaches from the Netherlands

Conceptually, understandings of civil society participation amongst the major NGOs or CFAs in the Netherlands originated around concerns to involve the beneficiaries or end users in designing and implementing projects that were to affect their lives, with the aim of making such projects more relevant and more sustainable. Although some aid agencies have always viewed participation through a more radical and political lens, for others it was the rise of rights-based approaches that shifted participation from an instrumental to a political meaning: the right to participate is seen as the right to claim all other rights. Thus, rather than thinking of people as beneficiaries, they are understood as citizens, not in the sense of a certain group of people with formal membership of a particular nation state, but as individuals with inalienable rights that only become effective when claimed through individual or collective action.

Yet it is the term 'civil society building' and not 'civil society participation' that is used by the CFAs to organize their work and report on results to the Dutch Ministry of Development Cooperation. Civil society building was defined by Biekart (2003: 15) in an earlier evaluation of the CFA's work as a capacity-oriented term, consisting of

- strengthening organizational capacities (of both formal and informal organizations) in civil society;
- building up and strengthening networks of, and alliances between, social organizations;

- building up and strengthening capacities for (policy) advocacy, with the aim of strengthening vertical intermediary channels between civil society and the state and/or the market;
- strengthening citizenship, social consciousness, democratic leadership, and social and political responsibility, with the aim of increasing participation of citizens in the public sphere.

Biekart's evaluation left the CFAs keen for more insights into other issues, particularly related to 'strengthening citizenship', and the concept of 'civil society participation' was proposed by the CFAs as a means to understand this. For the purposes of the follow-up evaluation, they defined it as:

> the opportunities of citizens – and more specifically of poor and/or marginalized citizens – and the organizations that represent them or can be considered their allies, to actively participate in and influence decision-making processes that affect their lives directly or indirectly. Participation includes 'agency', e.g. taking initiatives and engagement. (CORDAID et al., 2004: 6–7)

CSP is a layered concept with very diverse manifestations that links three development discourses and areas of practice: participation, civil society and citizenship. Within this, CFAs define civil society, broadly, as citizens and CSOs. As their funding is channelled through partner organizations, this was the unit of analysis of the study, and this has encouraged their adoption of an 'associational' understanding of civil society (Edwards, 2004).

Taken at face value, 'civil society participation' could be viewed as apolitical and neutral in terms of improving the lives of the poor and marginalized. As the explicit mission of these CFAs is to work towards the political empowerment of the poor and marginalized, the evaluation team qualified CSP in terms of its role in addressing societal inequalities. Thus, civil society participation is understood here as an essential contribution towards social justice, democracy and social cohesion.

To help the evaluation team operationalize this understanding, the CFAs identified the power cube framework developed by the Institute of Development Studies as the prime analytical lens for the study. The framework (see Figure 8.1) offers ways to examine participatory action in development and changes in power relations by and/or on behalf of poor and marginalized people (Gaventa, 2005). It does this by distinguishing participatory action along three dimensions:

- at three levels (or 'places): global, national and local;
- across three types of (political) 'space': closed, invited and created;
- different forms of power at place within the levels and spaces: visible (formal) power, hidden (behind the scenes) power, and invisible (internalized norms) power (see VeneKlasen and Miller, 2002).

Figure 8.1   The power cube
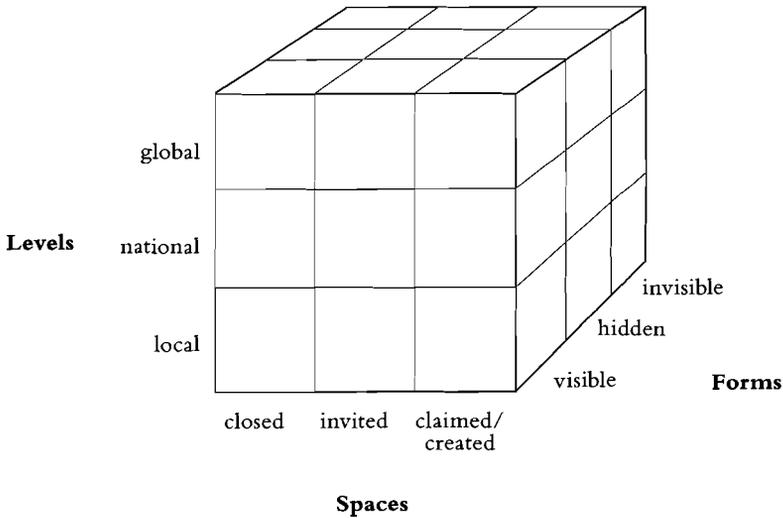
Source: Gaventa, 2005.

The framework was expected to provide more specific insights about the broad notion of 'civil society participation'. The framework understands power 'in relation to how spaces for engagement are created, the levels of power (from local to global), as well as different forms of power across them' (Gaventa, 2006: 2). Using this lens on citizen action enables strategic assessment of the possibilities of transformative action by citizens and how to make these more effective. Unpacking it to enable recognition of CSP during the fieldwork led the team to place inequitable power relations at the centre of their analysis. It meant looking for changes that represent increased, or deepened, participation in decision-making processes and/or the creation, opening or widening of spaces to this effect, either by poor and marginalized citizens or by civil society organizations.

Due to the choice of war-torn, (post-)conflict and fragile peace countries for the evaluation, this framework was supplemented by an explicit look at how violence shapes the potential for civil society participation (Pearce, 2004). The situation of spaces in such contexts adds to the cube a potential dimension of violence either as 'internalized fear/aggression' within it or 'externalized threat/force' outside it. The construction and widening of participatory spaces for the pursuit of social change agendas becomes much more problematic in such contexts, but also more urgent. Participation forces

a focus on alternatives to violence as a means of achieving social change and addressing grievances. The idea of 'civil' as opposed to 'uncivil' society also encourages reflection on which elements of associational life favour 'civil' outcomes that might promote collective goals through non-violent means and which remain committed to particular interests and ends with little discrimination around means.

Using a participation focus and power analysis, the evaluation team found that the CFAs are making a significant and often unique contribution to the capacity and development of civil society – and have been doing so, in some cases, for more than two decades (Guijt, 2005). Central in the work of their partner organizations is the focus on participatory action that tackles persistent inequitable power relations. The work touches geographically isolated areas, 'forgotten' social groups and taboo topics. An important aspect of success is the intertwining of work on several levels. To achieve results of some scale, many CSOs build chains of action, from mobilizing at community level up to national advocacy. Where they do not, impact is limited. Importantly – given the apparent divide between 'technical' and 'political' approaches among NGOs – activities on 'citizenship strengthening' which made information accessible and meaningful to people are often consciously connected to efforts to improve service delivery or lobby work.

The evaluation thus raised a series of critical issues for the CFAs to consider in their support of CSP. These include how service delivery can become transformational and be foundational for other manifestations of civil society participation, the importance of basic rights education work, and the need for situated expectations about democratization. However, the use of power analysis also uncovered significant gaps in the efforts of NGOs to challenge systematically some of the most important inequalities both within the development system, including issues of power and participation in the CFAs' relationships with partners, and within developing contexts, particularly concerning gender.

Co-financing as a particular approach to development

The term 'co-financing' within the Dutch development sector refers to the stream of money that flows from the Dutch government via specific Dutch NGOs with CFA status and then onwards to partner organizations in the South. This policy is an expression of the Dutch government's recognition that much of development emerges from civil society and not the state, and makes it possible for the Netherlands to support poverty eradication in countries where the Dutch government does not want to work with the government. A total of around 25 per cent of the development cooperation budget goes to a range of different national and international civil society organizations. Six organizations currently have CFA status,

namely CORDAID, ICCO, NOVIB, HIVOS, Terre des Hommes and Plan
Netherlands. Other Dutch organizations are eligible to apply to this stream
of funding, with conditions being that they have a broad programme of
activities in various countries that does not overlap with the existing CFAs.
Until recently the CFAs could count on a fixed percentage of the develop-
ment budget, but this has now merged with the thematic co-financing
budget into one 'co-financing' system. The co-financing system allows the
CFAs to secure resources for a four-year period, maintain autonomy over
their own programmatic directions during that time period, and support
a large and diverse set of initiatives. Each CFA has a different proportion
of its budget that comes from the Dutch government, depending on their
capacity to generate additional funds – ranging from around 30 per cent
to almost 90 per cent.

In this evaluation, it became apparent that sustaining investment over
long time frames was of significant importance to the success of CSP in the
countries. This is particularly the case with this type of NGO work given
the dynamics of democratization and the slow process of social change, as
well as the need to invest in multiple 'projects' of participatory democracy
simultaneously. However, as of 2007, a new system of allocating resources
has led to greater uncertainty and competition among Dutch develop-
ment organizations. For example, the new system demands that all CFAs
must raise 25 per cent of their own funding by 2009, thus fuelling further
competition among them. Although the government argues that the new
system enables greater transparency and programmatic quality of Dutch
development NGOs, it has been heavily criticized for its rigid formulaic
approach to allocating funds, inaccuracy due to double counting of certain
criteria and other errors in the allocation process, inability to recognize the
strategic added value of certain organizations, and disconnection of alloca-
tion decisions from longer-term evaluations (Schulpen and Ruben, 2006).
NGOs have invested enormous amounts of time to write highly detailed
strategic plans, in an exercise that, at its worst, has become about how
well an organization could present itself rather than the actual (potential)
contribution to development.

Contextual Features Affecting Civil Society
Participation in Conflict-affected Countries

Context is everything when it comes to the opportunities and risks for
promoting civil society participation. The potential for CSP to manifest
itself is strongly influenced by political, cultural, economic and historical
contexts. In all countries examined here, the history of protracted violence

and/or restrictive political regimes shape what kind of participation occurs at different levels and in diverse spaces. A focused context analysis in each country provided initial insights into the challenges for and development of civil society. Although the five countries involved in this evaluation are characterized by unique histories, cultures and politics that have shaped civil society in equally unique ways (see Table 8.1), several commonalities can be noted.

All five countries deal – to varying degrees – with a state with formal institutions in which de facto power dynamics limit the effective political opportunities of those in formally elected positions. All countries struggle with relatively new constitutions that have been eroded in practice or – as in the cases of Guinea and Guatemala (Buchy and Curtis, 2005; Gish et al., 2005) – that have yet to be implemented in meaningful ways. Violence, often open conflict, and the repression of civil society efforts are characteristics of each country, with Colombia offering the starkest examples of a corrupt institutionality in which extremely powerful drug and paramilitary interests act to maintain the new status quo.

Violence has profoundly marked the psyche of civil society in these countries, both historically and today. It has contributed to a climate in which political activity is deemed subversive, and therefore subject to reprisals or condemnation, and worse. Even within this evaluation, the evaluators in Colombia were asked to stop the tape recordings when topics became too sensitive, while in Uganda it is perhaps more insidious in terms of the self-censorship of CSOs with regard to where they dare to tread. As Pearce and Vela (2005) note,

> Violence does not just imply an external effect of threat. It can be internalised and be taken into participatory spaces where it can exist in the form of silences and inner fear, or even as aggressions towards others due to years of living in violent conditions and/or lack of appropriate channels for expressing differences and conflicts.

In Guinea, Uganda and Sri Lanka, CSO activities have been focused strongly in service delivery, particularly in Guinea where many such organizations are implementing government policies and strategies. In that context, CSOs are only just discovering their potential advocacy role, while this capacity is more strongly present and strengthening in Uganda and Sri Lanka. In both Guatemala and Colombia, civil society emerged from histories of (violent) resistance against repressive regimes, with Colombia reaping some benefits from a longer history of social movements while Guatemalan CSOs are still fragile and fragmented.

Decentralization, prominent in Guatemala, Sri Lanka, Guinea and Uganda, does not appear to have lived up to the full promise of more citizen

engagement in local development. It remains captured by state procedures and non-democratic processes, with only Uganda showing signs of potential for citizens' direct engagement in local development – and only then when mediated by organized groups. This is one example of the potential opening of closed spaces and the challenges CSOs have faced to use those spaces effectively in favour of the marginalized.

In Uganda and Guinea (although there investment is considerably less), the influence of foreign funding agencies on CSOs appears to be strong in terms of their financial dependency but also in terms of (active) partnership. In Guinea, CSOs and funding agencies alike have limited political dialogue with the state following laws that increased presidential powers, while in Uganda funding agencies actively encourage policy advocacy initiatives by CSOs. Guatemalan CSOs also have benefited from strong international support prior to but in particular after the Peace Accords of 1996.

In all countries, many civil society organizations face internal challenges, including limited human resource capacities, weak internal democratic processes, limited strategic capacity, limited networking, and a general related lack of confidence to engage with the demanding tasks of pro-poor democracy-strengthening activities.

Supporting Civil Society Participation in the South: The Role of CFAs

Approaches to CSP

Our examination of the myriad examples of 'citizen and civil society participation' led to a framework that identified six key domains. These domains are specifically concerned with the capacity of poor, marginalized and vulnerable people to realize their full citizenship. Each domain describes a form of participation and achievement in which CSOs play specific roles, and also lists a series of possible progress markers that could be observed among those involved. Together, these six domains of CSP can lead to structural change in societal, state and economic institutions for the realization of citizens' rights and the enhancement of democratic participation.

Citizenship strengthening comprises activities such as civic education about basic rights and engaging citizens in critical reflection on and capacity building around political processes, but also ensuring basic conditions such as birth registration that gives people formal access to their rights. These activities lead to better informed people who can understand their rights and are able to engage constructively and effectively in claim making,

Table 8.1 Overview of countries involved in the CSP programme evaluation

Country	Colombia	Guatemala	Guinea	Sri Lanka	Uganda
Population (m) (2003)	44.2	12.0	9.0	20.4	26.9
Human Development Index rank (out of 177) (2005)	69	117	156	93	144
Inequity (% share of income or consumption of poorest 20%) (HDI)	2.7	2.6	6.4	8.0	5.9
% living below national poverty line (1990–2002) (HDI)	64	56.2	40	25	44
Official development assistance received (net disbursements per capita, US$) (HDI)	10.1	20.1	30.0	18.2	25.5
Most recent constitution	1991	1985 (reforms 1993)	1990	1978	1995
Levels of government	3: national, departments (32) plus one capital district, municipalities	3: national, provincial (departments), municipal	5: national, region, prefectures, 'rural development communities', districts	3: national, province, district	6: national, district, county council, sub-county, parish, village
History of conflict	Ongoing since 1964 (founding of the FARC guerrilla movement)	Military rule until 1985; Peace Accords signed in 1996 (everyday violence increasing)	Dictatorship until 1984; current regime authoritarian, conflicts along Sierra Leone/ Liberia border	Early 1980s until now	1962–86 (regional conflicts continue)

Source: Country studies; Human Development Index.

collective action, governance and political processes. Examples of work in this domain include PREDO's work (CORDAID–Sri Lanka) that has facilitated the registration of people and helped plantation workers obtain 22,000 identity cards and 11,500 birth certificates. Plan's offices in Guinea and Uganda are working to ensure birth registration as a fundamental right of children – making these children visible citizens – and thus providing the statistical basis for good local development planning and monitoring the abuse of children's rights. Local youth clubs, youth radio and village drama are enabling children to learn about and engage in the issues that affect their future as citizens. In Uganda, Plan also works to establish school health clubs that raise children's awareness about the sexual rights and responsibilities and assist them to respond effectively to inappropriate physical or sexual exploitation and abuse. CALDH (Guatemala-HIVOS) is working with young people in the Human Rights Observatory, which receives human rights complaints in fifteen municipalities and which has a network of 150 representatives. The exposure of the youth to everyday rights abuses, from the family through to more public violence and abuse, via the complaints that the observers receive, gives them knowledge of the consequences of what might otherwise remain invisible. The young people have begun to analyse and understand the negative impact on Guatemala of the everyday abuses. This understanding of the importance of 'rights' helps them to legitimize a public role as defenders of those rights. The move of a few into broader public roles, such as participation on the local councils, is a significant outcome of the work.

People's participation in CSO governance, programming, monitoring and accountability relates to the notion of 'participatory culture' within and among CSOs, looking at how CSOs themselves understand and embody what would make for good participatory development. It manifests itself as critically (self-) reflective, democratically functioning and accountable CSOs that are responsive to the rights, values, aspirations, interests and priority needs of their constituencies. Examples for this domain would have required a more thorough look at the internal mechanisms of CSOs, which was beyond the scope of this evaluation. If more time had been available to look at this in depth, it would have included examples such as that of NAFSO (Sri Lanka–HIVOS), which insists on equal representation of men and women as a democratic practice, and active participation in networks and forums.

The third domain of civil society participation relates to CSOs that facilitate *people's participation in local development and service delivery initiatives.* For pro-poor local service delivery to become a reality, CSOs are building the capacity of local people to take on new roles and responsibilities in contexts of decentralization, establishing citizen-driven planning and management structures, and working to make service deliverers more responsive

to people's needs. Examples here abound, including the work of TDDA (CORDAID–Sri Lanka) to facilitate claims for service delivery under the post-conflict reconstruction programme; Oasis (HIVOS–Guatemala), which is undertaking sectoral coordination in relation to AIDS; and ACORD (NOVIB–Uganda), providing basic services to communities in northern Uganda. I comment further on the tension between service delivery and transformation in the next subsection.

Many CSOs involved in the evaluation are active in the area of *advocacy and structural change.* CSOs facilitate citizens to undertake their own advocacy work and also undertake lobbying work for certain groups. Related activities include research and consultation on 'forgotten' issues and with ignored groups, creating mechanisms for citizens to participate in public forums, putting issues on formal agendas, and mobilizing support for campaigns. Notable in many of the examples seen is the multiple levels at which activities occur, and the linkages between the levels – from community mobilization to national campaigns. Examples of work on this include:

- LABE's (Uganda–NOVIB) efforts in a national coalition focusing on adult literacy, which has been marginalized in policy making. Its advocacy and lobbying successes led to the participatory formulation of the Adult Literacy Strategic Investment Plan 2002/03, and has enabled local communities to monitor the allocation of funds to literacy programmes and demand accountability from district local councils and/or PAF funds.
- UDN (Uganda–CORDAID and HIVOS) led the campaign for debt relief, building a chain of action from community monitoring up to international advocacy, by investing in capacity-building, research and intensive use of the media for advocacy. To ensure that complaints about use of debt relief funds are acted on, UDN is facilitating communities to undertake quick-action advocacy. Nationally it remains the most reliable source of information on the effects of debt relief on poverty.
- UNIWELO (Sri Lanka–CORDAID) is a district-based CSO that has achieved official recognition of women in the Joint Plantation Development Committees, which were earlier exclusively for males.
- The National Association of Waste Recyclers (Colombia–NOVIB) is a grassroots social movement seeking to influence national and municipal policies towards waste collection and thus protect the livelihoods of some of the poorest citizens (15,000 families) of Bogotá. The Association has helped defeat President Pastrana's attempt to privatize waste recycling with Decree 1713.

A fifth domain in which CSOs are increasingly active is that of enhancing *citizen and CSO participation in economic life.* This work focuses on market

engagement by poor, vulnerable people (and organizations working on their behalf) on their terms and for their economic needs, and aiming to make the concept of pro-poor economic growth a reality. Despite being given limited attention in the evaluation (the CFAs being involved in a separate evaluation on this issue), two types of examples were found: organizing for economic justice such as holding the business sector to account, and the insertion of a pro-poor perspective and presence in existing economic institutions. Examples of the latter include: Diocese of Fort Portal (CORDAID–Uganda), which has developed an innovative marketing model for 'high volume–low value' crops; facilitating producer groups to engage with market boards and improve their bargaining power (CORDAID–Uganda); and CONIC's (HIVOS–Guatemala) role in developing participatory methods to work out strategic approaches to agrarian reform over multiple timescales.

CSOs are also active in cultivating values of *trust, dignity, culture* and *identity* that create the bedrock for mutually respectful social relationships and engendering trust in others based on positive experiences, which is essential for joint action in other domains. CSOs active in these areas include informal support groups for minorities, cultural expressions, and working on vibrant community centres. Examples include the Butterfly Peace Garden (BPG) (Sri Lanka–HIVOS), which works to help war-affected children overcome their traumatic experiences through arts, play and counselling. Children come to the garden in mixed groups, multi-ethnic, and multi-religious, from communities that are at strife with one another, a process that is contributing towards a healing and reconciliation effect among the wider community. In Guatemala, MMK (HIVOS-supported) enables Mayan women to understand the problems they face within indigenous communities and in spaces with non-indigenous men and women. The Mayan cosmovision-oriented work has helped women, over the years, to gain confidence and discuss issues around identity and sexuality that were never discussed publicly in the past.

Transformation through service delivery

While the CFA policies are clear about how service delivery work can enhance 'civil society participation', many of the partner organizations would not necessarily consider much of their service delivery work to fall under this label. Furthermore, it was clear that while partner organizations consider issues of power, (political) space and violence in their service delivery work, it is not always guided by a clear understanding of how service delivery, empowerment and CSP are related.

Nevertheless, some examples show what is possible – but also how the context shapes what can be expected. Plan's child-centred work in Guinea, Colombia and Uganda emphasizes this. The work has helped increase the

number of community organizations and strengthen local capacities within these countries, including examples where children take overall responsibility for project management and implementation. In Guinea, this happens under very difficult circumstances where development-oriented CBOs are still a relative novelty. Initiatives such as 'Child-to-Child' and the Children's Parliament increase children's participation in particular. Plan's school programmes offer models of education that encourage children to speak out, form their own opinions and engage in school decision-making. A further example comes from Uganda, where ACORD (NOVIB-supported) has evolved from a relief and infrastructure focus to an institutional and rights-based emphasis on capacity-building of local government and strengthening of civil society in the North. Local government has noticeably resisted civil society participation and CSOs have been relatively weak and contract-oriented. ACORD's encouragement and training have enabled a shift in the dynamics of civil society–local government relations, particularly in parish development committees, where CBOs are more visible and planning decisions are more transparent than at higher levels where NGOs dominate.

Since the relatively recent surge of interest in rights-based approaches (Cornwall and Nyamu-Musembi, 2005), development activities seem to be viewed by some development actors in a rather dichotomous manner as constituting either political or non-political work. Much of what is deemed to fit within a rights-based logic is considered 'political' and tackling structural causes of poverty, while the rest is considered 'old style' service delivery development that alleviates the symptoms of poverty. Again it must be noted that this is not the case for the CFAs, but has been noted among partner organizations. The CSP perspective of this evaluation challenges this simplistic dichotomy as being both unhelpful and misleading, leading to missed opportunities.

People's citizenship entitles them to basic services and provides the springboard for other developmental endeavours in terms of claiming rights. At the same time, claiming service delivery provision is itself a political act of rights realization. Therefore a critical component in service delivery is how the poor, marginalized and vulnerable (and their organizations) participate in defining needs and priorities, ensuring access to and quality of services, and collaborative service provision, including volunteer-based service provision. This is a decades-old debate that has spawned much of the participatory focus of development activities in recent times. Added to this is the renewed emphasis by many government funding agencies in the North on direct poverty alleviation goals in the form of service delivery as a technical/administrative activity, and a shift in channelling this through government channels in the interests of stimulating 'good governance'. As

a result, CSOs in general are experiencing a squeeze on resources for this work. Simultaneously, they are also recognized by funding agencies as playing a vital role in the social change and advocacy spheres.

Thus the challenge for CSOs lies in articulating clearly the interconnectedness between their service delivery function and that of more structural change-of-power relations, or the advocacy function. And the CFAs have a role to play in enabling and encouraging this.

The never-ending challenge of gender equity

All of the CFAs fund work that addresses gender inequalities, most often in ways that reflect the more political 'gender and development' approach, as opposed to the more conservative 'women in development' approach. Many partner organizations focus on:

> creating opportunities for women to occupy claimed spaces and to gain self-confidence in these claimed spaces. They prepare women to negotiate in the invited spaces with government authorities and with others with powerful positions like the police, community leaders, etc. They are equipped to challenge the power structures and to claim their rights. These women's groups are further strengthened through networking and often bring information on alternative forms of development to the 'male'-streamed development processes. (Perera and Walters, 2005: 33)

In Sri Lanka, HIVOS's support focuses on violence against women and migrant workers, while in Guatemala it supports CSOs that build (indigenous) women's capacity to claim rights and access decision-making, audit government policies and work on sexual identity. Plan's work on gender issues focuses largely on capacity-building for empowerment – through training of women promoters, ensuring girls' access to schools, and awareness-raising about reproductive rights, but also facilitating equitable access services and providing legal support. CORDAID's support for gender-related work in Sri Lanka focuses on the plantation sector, including violence against women, capacity-building and representation on plantation committees. In Uganda, regional and national legal rights advocacy work is funded by CORDAID, while in Colombia the work of the CSO Conciudadania stands out for building a sense of cultural identity and belonging which could enable a civic and civil response, notably by women leaders. NOVIB's work on gender in Uganda has focused mainly on advocacy issues, such as support for women's engagement with the review of the 1995 Constitution, and advocacy on women's land rights and on the Domestic Relations Bill. In Colombia, NOVIB supports work on promoting female participation in public policymaking and generating feminist consciousness.

The results of these efforts give rise to two observations in particular. First, gender relations, violence (in all shades) and civil society participation

are strongly interwoven. Intra-family violence in Colombia lays the basis for a climate of fear and social relationships mediated by conflict that affects the quality of citizen participation at other levels, such as the respect given to and felt by women in formal spaces. In Sri Lanka, the war, violence, insecurity and poverty have resulted in high levels of alcoholism, domestic violence and suicides, which adversely affect women disproportionately. Hence the importance of work such as Mujeres Maya Kaq'la (HIVOS–Guatemala), which helps Mayan women move from victimhood to public participants and that lays the foundation for more participatory society.

The second observation is the considerable variation in attitude among partner organizations to gendered aspects of CSP. The Uganda country study lauded the long-term investment by CFAs in women's organizations and the focus on gender issues, which had contributed to very significant advances for gender equality in terms of economic and political opportunities, policy analysis and change, competencies among women at all levels to have a significant voice on their issues, and strong organizations working on domestic violence, gendered dimensions of HIV/AIDS, education, and so forth. In Sri Lanka, notable advances have been made in the areas of Muslim women's rights and the lives of women tea plantation workers. By contrast, in Colombia, while women are high among the victims of sexual abuse, domestic violence and forced displacement, and have played key roles in community mobilizing and civil resistance, they still appear to be very poorly represented as political leaders and holders of power. In Guinea, while significant advances have been made in girls' schooling, which is undoubtedly significant work, and women are now allowed to participate in (some) councils of elders and community councils, other critical opportunities for engaging with entrenched gender inequalities and abuses, such as female genital mutilation and gender issues within CSOs, have not being taken up.

Understanding the gendered dimension of power and violence is a cornerstone of effective CSO support. Separating these two perspectives risks a false separation between support for gender-related action and for civil society participation in contexts of violence. As such, three useful suggestions can be made here. First, NGOs can seek a more integrated perspective on gender policies and conflict/peace-building policies, to come to a gendered understanding of violence and conflict that can then inform their country/regional strategies. Second, support for partner organizations should go beyond strategies that simply place women in previously 'closed spaces' and invest more in strategies that seek to transform these spaces in ways that ensure that they are genuinely used to further women's interests or to address tough topics related to invisible power. Third, NGOs need to assess whether their support – in a collective sense – constitutes the type of

multi-level action that is required to change patriarchal practices that exist throughout societies. Again, this will involve using the power framework to analyse where gender-equity obstacles exist, where strategic efforts are occurring and where critical gaps remain and could be addressed by the CFAs and their partner organizations.

Moving Forward: Conceptual and Practical Advances

Conceptually, two analytical tools were used within this study – the power analysis framework and the notion of CSP domains – and each emerged as having a high degree of practical relevance for how NGOs go about their work in this field. In addition, the evaluation showed that there are significant gains to be had in terms of promoting CSP where funding is sustained over significant periods; where international funder-partners encourage a participatory culture both within their local partners and between themselves; and also through the documentation and sharing of findings. I deal with each of these ways forward in turn.

The power cube framework

The 'power cube framework' that guided the study proved a valuable and flexible tool to seek answers about how power inequalities were being tackled and to stimulate discussions on strategies for and dynamics of par-ticipation with the CSOs. The workshops where partner organizations met to discuss 'civil society participation' were widely appreciated for enabling more detailed and strategic discussions on their activities. It helped the organizations locate their work alongside that of others, assess its relevance and reflect on the relative merits of different strategies being used. These discussions highlighted the changing in-country political realities, which had, for example, opened up new spaces for engagement in Uganda but in Colombia and Guatemala were threatening to close painfully conquered space. Rich-country level examples illustrated every dimension of the framework, varying greatly by context, shaped as they are by the histories and realities of violence and conflict. Clearly, there is no recipe for what constitutes effective participatory action.

The emerging issues related to 'place' and 'space' have several implications for CFAs and their partner organizations. They need to:

- continue to work at all levels (global to local) but invest more in conscious building of linkages between partners across these levels so that efforts can complement each other more strategically;
- encourage CSOs to strategise consciously about which 'space' (closed, invited, claimed) is most relevant and potentially effective for a specific

issue, but also in terms of what type of intervention is needed in each space – and then support partners to gain required capacities needed for greater effectiveness;

• be clear that 'participation' in a particular space does not necessarily mean transformation of power inequalities – there can be much action, with little political or practical change, but conversely many strategies of engagement are critical and necessary in order to affect the decision-making that affects the lives of the poor.

The dimension of 'power' has other practical potential:

• defining and recognizing the importance of different manifestations of power can ensure more consciously adopted, strategic action – and the identification of alternatives to current strategies – that can effectively transform power inequalities;

• the CFAs need to locate themselves more fully within the 'power cube framework', thus ensuring that analysis of participation and power is useful for them internally and not only for the CSOs.

Notwithstanding the usefulness of the framework for critical reflection, other uses must be approached with more caution (see Gaventa, 2006). In particular, the framework should be viewed as dynamic and flexible, and not as a static checklist for categorizing organizations.

The domains of civil society participation

A second 'tool for thought' is the six-domains framework of civil society participation. It helps specify more clearly what CSP means in practice and, in more general terms, renders underlying development processes more apparent and amenable to action through development interventions. The six domains, along with the findings from the country studies, underscore the CFAs' original concern that civil-society building, as it is often (but not universally) understood, does not adequately address deeper issues of participation, empowerment and voice in decision-making and political processes. In practice, CSB has often centred on strengthening civil groups and non-governmental organizations and their activities. What this study shows is the importance of questioning more critically the relationship between civil society groups and the active participation of citizens or the constituency they claim to represent in decision-making processes. The CSP concept adds a more critical perspective on the power and politics of participation in civil society action, which leads to a set of more distinct domains in which civil society can be seen to be active and where CFA support can be discerned. Significantly it untangles what funders can expect of CSOs and of citizens, as separate levels of intervention and impact.

Importantly, the domains framework can enable the CFAs to:

- assess with greater clarity the results of CSOs within each domain, thus giving them a clearer picture of their contribution towards enhanced civil society participation;
- target funding and other support more strategically; and
- be more specific about their expectations vis-à-vis specific partners and contracts.

Sustain funding through organizational and contextual transitions

Conspicuous in many of the examples is the use of multi-pronged strategies that have evolved over time. Many CSOs working on citizenship strengthening followed up with support for advocacy efforts, while citizen participation in service delivery and advocacy efforts often go hand in hand. Efforts to build dignity and relationships of trust are nested with civil rights awareness-raising. Two evolutions are evident in many of the cases. First, there is a clear shift in contexts where CSOs emerged from a history of service delivery from a welfarist to an empowerment approach. This is evident in Uganda and Sri Lanka, with early signs in Guinea. A second and related evolution is the growth of CSOs from single actions to a presence in various arenas, moving from localized, community-level activism to broader national (advocacy) efforts (Madre Selva, Guatemala–HIVOS) or from national lobby work to community capacity-building to enhance impact (UDN, Uganda–CORDAID/HIVOS). Taking on more complex issues has required more sophisticated strategizing, new competencies and the diversifying of activities.

Overall, the four CFAs collectively support a critical and diverse portfolio of relevant work in the five countries that enables the emergence and strengthening of civil society participation in diverse manifestations. This is a highly significant contribution to development at a time in which democratic and peaceful processes of social and political change are threatened in all the countries included in the evaluation. Given the vital contribution made by the CSOs funded by the CFAs to enhance civil society participation and given the urgent challenges, the CFAs must continue the nature and focus of their support to CSOs towards this effect.

The largely positive conclusion becomes even more significant when put into wider perspective, by noting how the Dutch CFAs compare to other funding agencies. All country studies except for Guinea offer views by the partner organizations of what is concluded clearly by Mukasa et al. (2005): that many other agencies funding CSP

    lack a cogent ideology and in the absence of a sustainable resource base, [so]
    they opportunistically shift from one issue to another due to donor dependency

> and influence. ... Many of the CSOs admitted that the CFAs provide the biggest
> and most reliable long-term core funding to them. They in particular lauded the
> CFA approach to funding, which is based on the partners' strategy as opposed
> to project-specific funding.

Such funding support is perhaps, at times, taken for granted in the Dutch development arena. This would be a mistake – it must be valued, nurtured and reinforced.

Learn, document, share

The study revealed a relative paucity of (clear) documentation by the CFAs and CSOs on strategies that successfully promoted citizen and CSO participation. If CFAs (and partner organizations) are to make claims about 'enhancing civil society participation', then the question is on what basis such claims are made. The specific and significant methodological challenges for monitoring and evaluating social change work are increasingly recognized. Given the processual and interconnected nature of activities that enhance civil society participation, this requires due attention to qualitative approaches for capturing results and impacts. If effectiveness indicators are to be developed, then outcomes that value the processes and changes in, for example, attitudes, behaviour and knowledge become important. The CFAs should scrutinize their monitoring and evaluation of CSP work to deal better with the complexity and context-specific nature of social change processes, building capacities and processes within the CFAs and partner organizations.

Invest in participatory cultures: internally and with CSOs

Building a 'participatory culture' must receive more attention, with fieldwork revealing a need for more reflection by CSOs on their own understandings of the participation, democracy building and conflict resolution that underpin their actions. 'Participatory development' is not just about increasing the voices in decision-making but represents values, such as respectful inclusion and democracy within social movements, that qualify 'participation' and make it positive or negative. The slow, uncertain and fragile nature of progress towards enhanced 'civil society participation' is only possible with a clear vision on rights-oriented development, staying power and strategic flexibility on the part of citizens and their organizations. These qualities are also needed of the CFAs that support them. All four CFAs are viewed by CSOs as very positive funding agencies and partners. The CFAs are clearly committed to the broader endeavour of peaceful and democratic civic societies, and provide long-term core funding that sees partners and projects through difficult times and transitions. They are steadfast either in their vision of development as requiring sustained action

to redress power inequalities, or in strengthening this vision where it is not yet developed.

This can be aided if CFAs strengthen their capacity to undertake power analysis. This can help them underpin and make more consistent their policies, strategies and procedures vis-à-vis partners, paying particular attention to assumptions about social change and what can be expected of CSOs, given the challenges of their operating environment. The CFAs themselves are agents of change, which they recognize. They need to recognize their own power in-country in shaping and furthering agendas of their partner organizations and initiatives and act on this, without creating (new) dependencies and without imposing international advocacy agendas on partners. Greater clarity on this requires an internal CFA analysis of its own agency in country-focused support, reconsidering its roles vis-à-vis partners and the CSP theme.

Vis-à-vis the CSOs, all CFAs face the similar challenge – of overcoming the existing deficit of direct dialogue with partners/project staff on enhancing citizen and CSO participation based on a power analysis. This should aim to enable partners to be more (self-)critical and strategic, based on their own visions of social change and given the types of operating environment outlined here. The CFAs should also invest more in processes for enhancing participatory (organizational) culture within the CSOs they support, as a critical component for strengthening the quality of the partners' participatory action.

Overall, the experience of how NGOs seek to promote civil society participation suggests the importance of several strategic approaches by NGOs and their funders, two of which have particular relevance here. The first concerns the importance of thinking more clearly around how and where to act and of (re)conceptualizing the challenges that promoting development alternatives entails. This requires frameworks of analysis that are both critically informed and practical. Two frameworks are proposed here, both with significant potential to help NGOs close the gap between development interventions and underlying processes of development. Second, it bears repeating that historical transitions – such as those towards lived (not simply formal) citizenship – may take a long time, particularly in contexts affected by conflict and violence. In such scenarios in particular, funding flows need to be long-term, flexible and designed in ways that give local partners the time and space to continually (re)define strategies to make the most of opportunities and deal with contextual constraints. If such approaches to co-financing are diluted or disappear, then the NGOs face even tougher conditions under which to pursue social change over the long run.

NGO acronyms

ACORD	Agency for Cooperation and Research in Development
CALDH	Centro de Acción Legal en Derechos Humanos
CONIC	Coordinadora Nacional Indígena y Campesina
CORDAID	Catholic Organization for Relief and Development Aid
DENIVA	Development Network of Indigenous Voluntary Associations
HIVOS	Humanist Institute for Cooperation with Developing Countries
LABE	Literacy and Adult Basic Education
MMK	Mujeres Maya Kaq'la (Mayan Women Kaq'la)
NAFSO	National Fisheries Solidarity
NOVIB	Nederlandse Organisatie voor Internationale Ontwikkelingssamen- werking (Netherlands Organization for International Development Cooperation)
PREDO	Plantation Rural Education and Development Organization
TDDA	Trincomalee District Development Association
UDN	Uganda Debt Network
UNIWELO	United Welfare Organization

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